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Public Involvement

Overview

Public involvement and participation in project development and programming activities are key elements in gaining public acceptance, which is critical to the success of any improvement program. The 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) reemphasized the necessity of public involvement. In Missouri, there are three significant components in the approach to public involvement. These are: (1) Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), (2) Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) and (3) MoDOT District Public Meetings.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Each of the six Missouri Metropolitan Planning Organizations, located in Columbia, Joplin, Kansas City, St. Joseph, St. Louis and Springfield, prepare a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) within their respective metropolitan planning areas. Each MPO has approved public involvement plans for their respective areas which allow for review and feedback from individual citizens, organizations, agencies and local area governments. Using public input as one of its decision factors, the MPO determines the projects to be programmed for construction in its area. These TIPs are integrated into the STIP without modification.

Regional Planning Commissions

Eighteen active Regional Planning Commissions are given the opportunity to provide input on area transportation needs. Through their respective Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) processes, comments and input from their members and general public outside the six metropolitan areas in out-state Missouri has been received and used in the MoDOT programming process.

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MoDOT District Public Meetings

Individuals attending public meetings, also called open houses, in each of the ten MoDOT districts provide comments and input on the Missouri Highway and Bridge Construction Schedule which was formerly called the Right of Way and Construction Program. Due to the open format of the meetings, ample opportunity for all interested individuals is given to voice concerns and raise issues related to the proposed program. Each individual is requested to complete a survey at the meetings and individuals are encouraged to contact their district office with future comments or to request additional information.

Public Involvement Process

During the past several years as part of MoDOT's Quality Improvement Initiative, we have been striving to involve our customers in the development and programming of transportation improvements. The 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) along with subsequent regulations enumerated requirements for public involvement in the development of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). This STIP will contain projects programmed for a three-year period as required. In addition, two more years of Missouri highway and bridge program projects will be included to provide more project tracking visibility. The STIP includes all projects that are eligible for Title 23 U.S.C. funding (highway) and references transit funding for projects. This section outlines the public involvement process that will be used each year during development of the STIP.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Affected MoDOT districts work closely with MPOs in metropolitan areas to provide a resource for input and comments toward programming projects during MPO public involvement processes. Each MPO has developed and approved their own respective public involvement processes responsive to needs of their particular metropolitan area.

MoDOT District Public Meetings

Each district may have public meetings during which citizens will have the opportunity to provide written comments, verbal comments, questions to district personnel and view displays of major projects in their districts. Copies of the existing STIP will be available for public viewing.

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The Public Affairs Division of MoDOT will be responsible for working with the district to set up the scheduling, format and advertisement of these meetings. Scheduling of the meetings will be made a couple of months in advance of the meeting and notification of the actual date, time, and location of the open house will be made three weeks prior to the meeting.

Regional Planning Commissions

Prior to the meetings, the district will begin work with the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) on their involvement with programming activities and the open house. The RPCs provide a regional perspective and expand our outreach as follows:

1. Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs) were established in each of the RPCs.
2. The TAC is a contact point for district personnel on MoDOT's position on transportation issues and to provide public input for prioritizing projects and the statewide transportation plan.
3. TEA-21 requires that projects using federal funds be developed with the cooperation of local officials. Since the Board of Directors of these RPCs is composed of local officials or their representatives, RPCs provide a logical structure to serve this requirement.
4. With the increased requirements for public involvement, RPCs serve as a forum for more than one aspect of our public involvement process. They are also working with the department in conjunction with the public meetings/open houses concerning the STIP in their respective regions.
5. The RPCs keep MoDOT districts informed as to the transportation needs in their area and apprise the districts of local thinking on how their region's transportation needs are being met.
6. The RPCs are our best contact for intermodal and multimodal transportation needs in the rural area of the state. They already are working with the MoDOT's Multimodal Operations on airports, river ports, rail, and rural transit needs.

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Public Review Period

After a preliminary draft version of the STIP based on public and engineering input is developed and printed, a 30-day public review period begins. During this public review period, copies of the STIP are distributed to MoDOT districts for public access. Citizens have the opportunity to provide written comments, verbal comments or telephone comments to district representatives during this period. Input from this part of the process will be used to measure the effectiveness of the STIP to begin making improvements on the next years STIP as well as its production processes.

STIP Amendments

Projects can be amended to the STIP and a metropolitan area TIP at any time during the year. The amendment process itself is outlined in a separate section. The public involvement process for STIP amendments will occur prior to incorporating the project in the STIP. Public involvement on projects inside a MPO area will be done by the MPO according to their approved TIP amendment process.

For amended out-state project(s) that are considered to be major transportation corridor investments, a 30-day public review period will be provided. During this public review period, copies of the document defining the project(s) will be distributed to the affected district(s). Citizens will have the opportunity to telephone or write comments to district representatives during this period. The Public Affairs Division is responsible for notification and education of this review process. Notification should begin a minimum of 15 days prior to the public review period.

Comments for out-state project(s) that are not considered major transportation investments are solicited from the affected governing bodies including counties and/or cities. After concurrence by all affected parties, the project(s) are amended quarterly into the STIP.

Ongoing Process

Throughout the year, MoDOT District Engineers, district personnel and central support personnel attend meetings and receive comments from the public on the STIP. Memorandums of these comments should be forwarded to the MoDOT Office of Transportation Program Management for programming use and inclusion in that year's public involvement file. Public involvement is ongoing and is not considered as a once-a-year occurrence.